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ABSTRACT

Adult guidance in community settings offers a holistic, personal development approach to individuals wishing to change their work or learning situations. Adult guidance in community settings can include some or all of the following: offering initial information and advice; signposting to other agencies; and providing guidance through group or individual activities. Guidance delivered through community settings must be client centered, relaxed and informal, totally voluntary, and familiar (and hence unthreatening) venues. Emphasis on individual personal development and a holistic approach to problem solving and decision making are major elements of guidance delivered through community settings. All evidence indicates that access to information and guidance is a bigger problem than availability of information and guidance. Because barriers to participation in learning are often perpetuated by the education and training system itself, it is especially important to make provisions to reach those groups that have been traditionally been underrepresented in postschool education and training. Strategic approaches to adult guidance should do the following: (1) fully acknowledge the critical part adult guidance plays in supporting adults in the process of self-determination with regard to their learning and work options and (2) recognize the need for different types and levels of guidance provision. (MN)

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NICEC

Briefing

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Adult Guidance in Community Settings

Adult guidance delivered in community settings offers a holistic, personal development approach to individuals wishing to make changes in their work or learning situations. Key features are:

- a client-centred approach;
- flexible delivery;
- familiar, non-threatening locations;
- open door/drop-in access;
- provision that is not time-bound;
- availability of ongoing support.

This Briefing aims to:

- provide definitions of adult guidance delivered in community settings;
- explore the holistic approaches used by practitioners in community settings;
- identify issues relating to adult guidance and lifelong learning and its role in tackling the 'learning divide';
- identify issues related to adult guidance delivered through community settings and to the development of a national quality-assurance framework for guidance;
- make recommendations for future planning.

The Briefing is based on feedback from a 24-hour NICEC/DfEE consultation with practitioners working in community settings. It has been written by Heather Jackson (NICEC Fellow) and Lesley Haughton (NICEC Associate), and supported by funding from the Individual Learning Division of DfEE.

NICEC

The National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling is a network organisation initiated and supported by CRAC. It conducts applied research and development work related to guidance in educational institutions and in work and community settings. Its aim is to develop theory, inform policy and enhance practice through staff development, organisation development, curriculum development, consultancy and research.

CRAC

The Careers Research and Advisory Centre is a registered educational charity and independent development agency founded in 1964. Its education and training programmes, publications and sponsored projects provide links between the worlds of education and employment. CRAC has sponsored NICEC since 1975.

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DEFINING THE PROVISION

Not only are the types of activities delivered in community settings varied and wide-ranging: so are the levels of involvement. Some practitioners provide a full range of adult career guidance activities; some are involved in initial information and advice giving; and some are only involved in signposting to other agencies, although often at a critical time in an individual's life. All take a client-centred approach, responding to a number of different presented needs.

The nature of community-based provision means that it is not easy to provide an all-encompassing definition. However, the following gives an idea of where provision takes place, who does it and what kind of service is delivered:

- *information and signposting* activities undertaken by professionals who have other community/social roles and responsibilities – e.g. health and social workers, home care workers, health visitors and district nurses, doctors, probation officers, those working in religious organisations and union officials;
- *guidance* delivered by community-based agencies with a broad remit to offer a range of information, advice, guidance and support services to clients, of which learning and work would form only a part;
- *guidance* delivered through such learning initiatives as family learning centres, family literacy schemes, neighbourhood projects, community education, and home-school liaison;
- *guidance* provided on a purely personal level, which is informal, undocumented and untrackable, e.g. by members of the family, friends and work colleagues.

Guidance delivered through community settings has a number of distinctive features and benefits. These include:

- being undertaken within a broader agenda of individual health and personal development, often addressing a number of different, but related, needs;
- being delivered by practitioners whose remit with clients is often much broader and wider-ranging than just guidance for learning or work;
- approaches that prioritise:
  - outreach;
  - befriending;
  - discretion and confidentiality;
  - advocacy (as appropriate);
  - individual attention to special needs;
  - ongoing support and accessibility;
  - no charge.

Above all, approaches are relaxed and informal, are *totally voluntary* and usually take place at venues people already go to, are familiar with, and are non-threatening.

A HOLISTIC APPROACH

A major element of guidance delivered through community settings is the emphasis on individual personal development, and the holistic approach to problem-solving and decision-making. Personal development is the platform on which the work is undertaken.

While an attempt has been made to define the location, style and delivery of services, the nature of the intervention is the key feature of community-based guidance which needs to be highlighted. It is this which sets it apart from the more formal, traditional career guidance on offer. Much of the guidance delivered through community settings does not have the volume and quality of resources available in other guidance settings. What it does provide, however, is a non-discriminating, client-centred and holistic approach to individual needs.

Key features of the holistic approach are that:

- the provision is not time-bound, is free at the point of access and is delivered through locations that are both familiar and non-threatening to clients;
- it is non-discriminating with regard to individual needs – a range of complex related issues might be discussed and considered as part of a broader, holistic approach to life-planning and decision-making;
- it takes a personal development approach to individual needs and expectations;
- it provides informal mentoring, befriending and advocacy as required, with clients being able to return several times for confirmation, clarification or support to next steps;
- the development of client-motivation and self-esteem are central to the success of the service;
- it aims to lead the client towards autonomy, but in such a way as to provide a secure and safe jumping-off point;
- it provides important information and signposting activities to more specialist services.

The client-centred and non-discriminating nature of the intervention is central to community-based provision, and the reason adults will often choose this type of service as a first option. Many adults have no concept of the term 'career', and will not therefore be initially attracted to organisations offering career guidance. Also, the rigidity of the funding arrangements of careers services, and to a certain extent FE colleges, means that they are less likely to be able to take the longer-term flexible responses that guidance in community settings can provide.

GUIDANCE AND LIFELONG LEARNING

> 'Learning is central to economic success and social cohesion. As we approach the twenty-first century and the immense challenges of the global economy and unprecedented technological change, achieving these inseparable national goals will depend more and more on the knowledge, understanding and skills of the whole population. Recent policies to increase participation and achievement in learning have achieved some success, but mainly in providing opportunities for those who have already achieved to continue to do so. Those who are disadvantaged educationally are also disadvantaged economically and socially; equity and viability dictate that all should have the opportunity to succeed... We must widen participation (in learning), not simply increase it. Widening participation means increasing access to learning and providing opportunities for success and progress to a much wider cross-section of the population than now.'
>
> Helena Kennedy QC: *Learning Works – Widening Participation in Further Education* (FEFC, 1997)

Only one adult in four describes him/herself as a current learner; one in three has taken no part in education or training since leaving school (Fryer Report, *Learning for the Twenty-First Century*, 1997). The Labour Force Survey regularly finds only 14% of all employees taking part in job-related training, and a third of all employees still say that they have never been offered any kind of training.

Finding ways of promoting the benefits of learning to adults, ensuring they have access to information, advice and guidance about the learning opportunities available to them, and, even more importantly, facilitating their commitment to lifelong learning, is a challenging agenda. Particularly challenging is how to attract those adults for whom education has always been 'something other people do', and who have probably little understanding of the critical link between learning, work and achievement.

The Kennedy Report goes on to express concern about the current provision of advice and guidance:

> 'The current provision of advice and guidance is inadequate to support our aim of widening participation (in learning). It would be true to say that, at present, anyone who wants initial advice and guidance can generally get it. The snag is that they need to have the self-confidence and awareness of what is available to seek it out and to present themselves for it. Potential learners who are outside the magic circle of education and training where it is provided get the worst deal of all.'

Availability of information and guidance does not appear to be the problem – *but access to it is*. These findings are supported by evidence from the DfEE's own guidance-related programmes (Gateways to Learning, Access to Assessment, Skill Choice) all of which highlighted the need to:

- promote more effectively the value and benefits of guidance to adults – many adults will not seek out guidance because they neither understand it, nor see its point;
- recognise that what many adults actually require is up-to-date, accurate impartial information which is:
  - accessible on a drop-in basis or by phone as required;
  - in venues that are familiar and non-threatening;
  - provided by trained staff.
- recognise the important role of guidance offered as part of other services or activities, particularly when delivered through community settings.

In order to improve guidance provision, a variety of approaches are required through a range of locations and agencies. It is neither appropriate nor practicable to identify a single key provider of adult guidance. For most adults – particularly those lacking the confidence to approach formal educational agencies – the more informal and friendly the service, the more likely they are to use it.

THE MATSON NEIGHBOURHOOD PROJECT

The Matson Neighbourhood Project (MNP) opened in 1990 as part of Gloucestershire County Council's response to a 1980s White Paper on locality development. Matson has the largest council housing estate in Gloucester, with a disproportionate number of young single people and single-parent families. Unemployment in the area stood at 20%.

Helping to Make Matson Better is the Project's motto. It has five main strands of activity:

- advice and representation
- mental health
- jobs, education and training
- furniture recycling
- community support

The services that the Project provides are a direct result of listening to what local people say they want. Access to 'shop-front' advice is available, as are home visits. Advisers deal with a range of needs, including those directly (or indirectly) related to issues around learning and work.

During the first year of the opening of the advice centre (a converted fruit and vegetable shop in the Matson Shopping Parade), 778 education and training enquiries were generated, 3,575 vacancies advertised, and over 100 people helped with job search. In 1996/97 unemployment in Matson fell by 38%, and 120 residents secured jobs through the Project, accounting for half the fall in unemployment. Generally, the demand for the Project's advice services increased by 50% in 1996/97.

The Project is committed to developing a strong community infrastructure and to helping local people to help themselves through developing sustainable networks and resources. That the project is part of the voluntary sector is very attractive to local people, who may feel anxious about discussing their problems with representatives from the statutory sector. The Project offers a safe, non-judgemental setting in which individuals are helped to find their own solutions/or are at least pointed in the right direction.

The Project is funded through a number of different public- and private-sector bodies and companies, including the City and County Councils, the local Health Authority and the European Social Fund.

TACKLING THE LEARNING DIVIDE

'The personal and social damage inflicted by inequality, social exclusion and restricted opportunity is now widely recognised. Lifelong learning should represent a resource for people, and whole societies, to help them identify such inequalities, probe their origins and begin to challenge them, using skills, information and knowledge to achieve change. Learning alone cannot abolish inequality and social divisions, but it can make a real contribution to combating them, not least by eliminating the ways in which social exclusion is reinforced through the very processes and outcomes of education and training.'

Fryer Report, *Learning for the Twenty-First Century*, 1997

Barriers to participation in learning run deep and are often perpetuated by the education and training system itself. If the goal is for all adults to be proactive and engaged in a culture of lifelong learning, they need to have access to the right kind of guidance at the right moment in their lives. The current infrastructure of learning and guidance still falls far short of that goal, notwithstanding the wealth of good work that does go on and the progress that has been made.

The established education system in the UK bears the strong imprint of the sectional needs of the middle classes. Career success for the few at the leading edge is supported by a long trailing edge of failure for most:

- one third of the population cohort can now go to university and gain access to the most secure and best paid of the jobs on offer at professional and managerial levels;
- one third emerge from school undereducated, more than half of them illiterate and innumerate, set up for lifelong non-learning;
- one third falls into a twilight world in between.

... For most people, the insidious effects of early failure in the formal system continue to undermine motivation for learning – through life, and generation on generation.

Jim Smith and Andrea Spurling: *Individual Lifelong Learning Accounts: Towards a Learning Revolution* (NIACE, 1997)

The list of groups under-represented across the whole range of post-school education and training is long. It includes:

- unskilled manual workers;
- part-time and temporary workers;
- people without qualifications;
- unemployed people;
- some groups of women – notably lone parents, and those on the lowest incomes;
- those living in remote or isolated locations;
- some ethnic and linguistic minority groups;
- people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities;
- people with literacy and/or numeracy difficulties;
- ex-offenders;
- disaffected young adults, and notably young men.

All kinds of influences will be available to adults looking for a change of direction. Those within Kennedy's 'magic circle' will know who to approach in order to seek guidance about their learning or work options. Those outside will probably not, and will look to the more familiar for help. Key influencers in this situation will be the immediate family, peer group and work colleagues, as well as:

- health, social-care and other professionals working closely with individuals in communities;
- school teachers, tutors and community education workers;
- religious organisations;
- a wide range of community-based organisations.

While the list is broad and varied, they have common features:

- none are formal guidance agencies;
- all have as the main purpose of their work a linked, but not necessarily learning-based, community activity or service;
- all the services are locally delivered and offer entry to a familiar, non-threatening environment;
- all are concerned with the wider health, spiritual or social well-being of the individual.

The importance of this type of 'front-line' guidance provision, delivered informally in community settings as part of a broader individual agenda, cannot be over-stated.

THE LINK PROJECT

The Link Project is based in Tower Hamlets, and aims to support local unemployed people through a process which includes: vocational advice and guidance; personal development; motivation and orientation; language and basic skills support; job search; guided CV writing; interview skills training and analysis; and feedback on unsuccessful interviews. 90% of users are from local ethnic-minority groups, including 70% Bangladeshi, 10% Somali and 8% other black and Asian groups. All actions focus on users finding successful routes into learning or work.

The Link Project provides an informal, friendly environment on the ground floor of the Bethnal Green Training Centre, situated at the heart of Spitalfields. Staff are experienced and reflect the linguistic and cultural profile of the area. There is a secondee from the local Jobcentre, which provides useful, informal links through to Employment Service provision and entitlements. Access is available on a drop-in basis, with users returning as often as they need to for ongoing support and guidance.

The Project is linked to Tower Hamlets Summer University. Through systematic outreach work with local youth groups young people are signposted to the Project for support and advice.

Project funding is currently secured through the ES (via the secondee from the local Jobcentre), London East TEC's PASSPORT initiative and the European Social Fund.

ENSURING QUALITY

The National Advisory Council for Careers and Educational Guidance has produced a set of Quality Standards for Guidance on Learning and Work. The Standards have been developed by practitioners in the guidance sector, and are the result of extensive consultation and field trials. The foreword to the Standards states that they:

> '... have an overt client focus and have applicability to the whole of the adult guidance work. It is intended that they are used throughout 1997/98 as the basis of a potential accreditation system.'
>
> Rodney Buse, Chair, The Guidance Council, July 1997

It has always been the intention that these Standards should provide the basis for a system of accreditation across all sectors delivering guidance relating to learning and work, thereby providing a national infrastructure of quality-assured services.

While the standards are a welcome and significant development, their application to the kind of 'informal' adult guidance – delivered through community settings – considered in this Briefing is problematic, for the following reasons:

- guidance delivered through community settings is often provided as part of another service, making it difficult to apply a set of discrete, specific standards;
- the very nature of the provision means that the service is client-centred, often non-specific and not resourced in the same way as institutional careers guidance services might be – many of the Standards simply would not apply;
- much of the structured guidance work provided through community settings is undertaken by the voluntary sector, budget and resource constraints will almost certainly inhibit compliance with the Quality Standards.

There will be plenty of scope, however, for some of the Standards to provide a valuable base-line quality indicator of service delivery for community-based provision. Particularly valuable in this respect will be the Standards for Statements of Service, Information, Referral, and Monitoring and Feedback.

On individual staff competence and quality, the current NVQ qualifications framework distinguishes between advice and guidance. In practice, community-based guidance may often fall somewhere in between the two. Certainly, practitioners working in community settings may well be involved in both. In these cases, it is difficult to see just which route they should follow.

OUTREACH AT CHESTERTON COMMUNITY COLLEGE

The Chesterton Community College Outreach Initiative involved the appointment of an outreach worker to provide community-based advice, guidance and learning activities for women. Emphasis was to be on those women who had traditionally been regarded as non-participants in learning – i.e. the unemployed, ethnic-minority groups, the unqualified, low-income groups and lone parents.

Initial links were made with head teachers, church and religious leaders, health visitors, community development workers, youth workers, social workers, counsellors, the Cambridge Women's Resource Centre, the Ormiston Trust, local councillors, tenants' associations, careers guidance workers, the Benefits Agency (particularly on the New Deal for Lone parents), the Jobcentre and all other FE providers. These early contacts provided an invaluable network for the outreach worker as well as important information on facilities and existing services.

Initiatives set up included:

- parenting groups in the local primary school, supported by mobile crêche facilities;
- confidence-building/job-search programmes, with emphasis on the specific needs of individuals;
- an Asian women's dressmaking course;
- a community-based taster course, leading to links through to college-based provision;
- monthly drop-in sessions at a community location.

The emphasis was on building self-esteem, self-confidence and exploring potential. All activities were held within the community, in familiar, non-threatening environments.

'Through listening, advising, encouraging, guidance and supporting (literally holding hands in some instances) and always following up to check progress, it has been possible to enable people to participate. For many, meeting the tutor beforehand or attending a small class in a local community centre has been a thoroughly enjoyable experience and has fostered the belief that education, in its broadest sense, is for them. The knock-on effect can be very rewarding, such as a participant informing you that she has got a full-time job as a result of the confidence she gained....'

Kate Blackwell, Outreach Worker

RECOMMENDATIONS

In planning approaches to lifelong learning, strategic approaches to adult guidance must be developed that:

- Fully acknowledge the critical part adult guidance plays in supporting adults in the process of self-determination with regard to their learning or work options.
- Recognise the need for a range of different types and levels of adult guidance provision, and the importance and value of guidance delivered through community settings.

If these strategic approaches are to be developed, they must:

- Acknowledge that informal 'front-end' guidance may be necessary before an individual can interrogate a helpline, benefit from more in-depth services, or be in a position to make an informed choice.
- Recognise that competition between those who deliver services, and the adoption of 'territorial' attitudes towards information resources, are not helpful to practitioners working in a community setting.
- Ensure that telephone helplines are accessible to community-based guidance practitioners as well as to individual adults seeking information.
- Acknowledge (and identify appropriate action to rectify) the resourcing difficulties facing community-based practitioners. Many lack the resources to provide client access to IT facilities, up-to-date labour market data and other current information. Also the complex, multi-faceted nature of their work often excludes them from local networks.
- Recognise the need for the guidance delivered through community settings to have equal status with mainstream provision. Mutual trust and respect needs to be developed, and better bridges built between different types of guidance activity.
- Recognise that in areas where social exclusion factors are a priority, community-based adult guidance provides an important bridge to mainstream services.
- Recognise that much of the adult guidance delivered through community settings is undermined by the uncertainties of short-term funding: staff can divert a high proportion of time chasing funding, rather than developing the provision. In such cases the funding can dictate the planning rather than contribute to the main objectives of the service.
- Acknowledge the value of the client-centred nature of community-based provision, and of informal and flexible access to a range of support activities to individual adults, as crucial stepping stones to learning or career development.

FURTHER COPIES

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